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HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS NAMES INTERNATIONAL INQUIRY PANEL ON EAST TIMOR

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson announced today the composition of the international commission of inquiry that will look into possible violations of human rights and acts which may constitute breaches of international humanitarian law committed in East Timor since January 1999.

The High Commissioner said Sonia Picado of Costa Rica, Judith Sefi Attah of Nigeria, Justice A.M. Ahmadi of India, Justice Mari Kapi of Papua New Guinea and Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger of Germany would make up the commission, which is expected to go to the region following working meetings in Geneva later this month.

In making the announcement, the High Commissioner said she was convinced that the high level of competence and the integrity of the members of the commission would ensure that "the significant task at hand will be carried out thoroughly and according to the highest standards of independence and impartiality".

"We owe it to the people of East Timor to investigate seriously and objectively the terrible reports of grave human rights violations and establish responsibility for any crimes committed", she continued.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, meeting in special session on 27 September, called on the Secretary-General to "establish an international commission of inquiry, with adequate representation of Asian experts, in order, in cooperation with the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights and thematic rapporteurs, to gather and compile systematically" information on possible violations (Commission resolution 1999/S-4/1). On 28 September the Secretary-General entrusted the High Commissioner with setting up the commission.

The panel is to provide the Secretary-General with its conclusions by 31 December "with a view to enabling him to make recommendations on future actions, and to make the report of the international commission of inquiry available to the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission".

Inquiry Commission Members

The members of the international commission of inquiry on East Timor have extensive legal and human rights experience. The chair of the team, Sonia Picado, is presently a member of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly and vice-chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. A professor of law and former Ambassador of Costa Rica to the United States, she has also served as judge and vice-chairperson of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. She has published widely on human rights issues.

Judith Sefi Attah is a former Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development. Mrs. Attah was a member of the United Nations Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (now called the Subcommission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights) from 1987 to 1997. She has represented her country in various capacities, including as member of the Nigerian delegation to the Commission on Human Rights and as Ambassador to Italy, Greece and Cyprus.

A.M. Ahmadi is a former Chief Justice of India. His long legal career began in 1954 when he joined the Bar at Ahmedabad. He became a Judge of the Supreme Court of India in 1988, and was appointed Chief Justice in 1994.

Mari Kapa is Deputy Chief Justice of Papua New Guinea. He has held various posts in Fiji's judicial system, including Public Solicitor, Judge of the National and Supreme Courts and Judge of Appeal of the Fiji Court of Appeal.

Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger is a former Federal Minister of Justice and a member of the German Bundestag (Parliament), where she sits on the Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance. Trained in law, Mrs. Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger has served as honorary judge at the Munich Labour Court and the Federal Disciplinary Court.

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